

In Euripides play Medea, the character of Medea is commonly described as being both manic and wicked. I do agree that throughout the play Medea does show herself to be manic individual and does commit a number of “wicked” acts, but I do not believe that she as much wicked as she is unstable, there are many other factors that need to be taken into account.

Medea is a strong powerful woman in a time and society in which woman were considered weak and did not have a voice. Throughout the play Medea is shown as being completely other, she has supernatural powers and is from a far away land, and will do anything she feels fit for what she believes to be right, even if these acts could be considered wicked “a foreign woman coming among new laws, new customs, needs the skill of magic”. The men around her throughout the play treat her differently due to this “otherness” not so much respecting her but not talking to her as he would an Athenian woman. Before the play is set Medea has committed a number of atrocious crimes; killing her own brother in order to escape her father and coercing the daughters of Pelios into killing their own father after he wronged Jason. While it is hard, especially from a modern perspective, to in any way justify these acts, one can also see that she does not commit these crimes for no reason, she doesn’t kill randomly and at no point in the play does Medea suggest she takes pleasure in the act of ending a life. It seems that instead she behaves as she feels she must to do what is necessary even if that involves killing those who oppose or harm her. In my opinion this seems to so much as wicked as mentally unstable.

Throughout the play Medea acts in a way that is manic, it is clear that all those around her are worried about her state of mind. Even Her own nurse, someone who would have known Medea intimately having raised her and travelled to Greece with her, fears what Medea might do drawing particular attention to what she may do to her children in hopes of getting revenge on Jason “I’ve watched her watching them like a wild bull”. Creon, King of Corinth and father of the woman for whom Jason has left Medea for, fears that Medea may wish to cause harm to him and his own and as a result of this fear plans to exile Medea “My blood runs cold to think what plots you may be nursing deep within your heart”. At this point in the play despite the suspense being built it is hard for one not to pity Medea’s plight, her husband has abandoned her, she has no family to turn to so without her husbands support a lonely greek woman would have had little way of supporting herself in a manner that was respectable especially if she had been exiled. Medea’s state of mind is one of great turmoil, for the opening scene of the play we do not see Medea herself instead Medea is heard lamenting her fate, another example of Medea’s insanity.

Many believe that that Jason was solely responsible for Medea’s many wicked deeds. If Medea had never met Jason than she would have never left her family, never killed her brother and never had to live in a society in which she is a cultural alien. Everything she did was done for Jason, she is a passionate woman and her love for Jason was intense her nurse describing her as being “mad with love” and Jason’s disloyalty. Divorce was not uncommon in Greek society and at one point in the play the chorus, who throughout had been on Medea’s side, believe she is behaving in a way that is too melodramatic “this thing is

common why let it anger you”, but in my opinion that for a woman who was already unstable, Jason's cruel betrayal and Creon's exile was enough to have push Medea over the edge “I shall strike dead father daughter, and my husband”. Jason leaves Medea and her children in favour of another woman, two reasons are given for this betrayal Jasons claims that he wished for a wife that would be politically advantageous “What luckier chance could I have met, than marriage with a King's daughter,” and Medea's nurse, who resents Jason, claims that it was because Jason wanted a younger prettier girl “Jason is a prisoner in a princess's bed”. Whatever the reason Jason abandons Medea and her children in a cruel way, Jason claims he planned to support her and her children “It is not for the sake of any women that I have made this royal marriage, but as i have already said to ensure your future". However he does not make any mention of this until after Medea has been exiled and he no longer plans to offer this support. All of Medea's crimes are committed by way of a punishment for betraying her. She is even willing to kill her own children to punish Jason despite her love for them, she is convinced that it is the only way that she can truly punish Jason is by killing those he loves”This is the way to deal Jason the deepest wound”. It would seem that there is still a part of Medea that loves Jason as she does not simply kill him.

Despite Medea's motivation and justification for her crime, there is no avoiding the fact that Medea's actions are evil, she killed her own children, who had never ever done anything to hurt her and who loved her and trusted her “what have they to do with their father's wickedness”. She also killed Creon whose only crime was to wish to protect his daughter “I'd rather make you my enemy now, than weaken, then later paywith tears”, even Glauce despite being the woman who Jason left Medea for, was not truly at fault she didn't chose Jason she was offered it was her duty to marry the man chosen for her. From the very start we know that Medea is planning some type of revenge which in Greek society was perfectly acceptable, but even they would see her crimes as being unforgivably wicked. The audience, as the play progresses, switch from pitying Medea ,to pitying Jason, Jason has over the years used Medea for his own gain, but nobody deserves to lose their own children “killed my sons? the words kill me” . Medea's revenge is justified but she takes it to far, showing herself to be both manic and wicked.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that Medea is manic, she kills all those that get in her way, and any that she needs to in order to complete her revenge. Despite this it seems hard to describe her as being completely evil, while she has killed many, she does not kill randomly, she only kill those that have wronged her, and she never kills for pleasure. So while she is most definitely dangerously unstable and capable of truly evil acts, I do not think she is truly evil.

